

PENTECOST 8

Proper 10 - Year B

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Amos 7:7-15

⁷This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will spare them no longer;

⁹the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with
the sword.”

¹⁰Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹For thus Amos has said,

‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’”

¹²And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there, ¹³but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

¹⁴Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Amos, a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees, and, despite his protestations, a prophet, brings bad news from the Lord: Israel has been measured and tested with the plumb line and found wanting. You can understand the difficult position the priest is put in; Amaziah is bound to support God and the king both, and he finds it easier to send Amos away than to heed his warnings and condemn the king.

Perhaps to a less serious degree, this is a situation in which we might regularly find ourselves. When our allegiances to any temporal group - country, party, family – run up against our allegiances to God, it is very, very easy indeed to avoid that problem, shunt off or ignore anyone ringing alarm bells, and hope that God either forgives or forgets. But in doing so, we know that we are damaging our souls.

Discussion Questions

Where have you seen a similar dynamic at play?

Where else in scripture have you seen normal, everyday people being called by God to a new role?

Psalm 85:8-13

- ⁸ I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, *
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.
- ⁹ Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear
him, *
that his glory may dwell in our land.
- ¹⁰ Mercy and truth have met together; *
righteousness and peace have kissed each
other.
- ¹¹ Truth shall spring up from the earth, *
and righteousness shall look down from
heaven.
- ¹² The LORD will indeed grant prosperity, *
and our land will yield its increase.
- ¹³ Righteousness shall go before him, *
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

This psalm's opening verses are different in tone, briefly laying out God's mercy toward his people in history and praying for the same deliverance from both worldly and Godly wrath. The psalmist commits to listening to God's (active) speech, dreaming of a world in which faithful people follow in God's wake as truth, righteousness, prosperity, mercy, peace, and truth characterize their lives. What a day this will be! The times heralded by Amos' provocative prophecy are over, and the people are handsomely rewarded for their faithfulness.

Discussion Questions

Why do you think God cares about the righteousness of God's people?

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Continuing the theme of a loving God, both just and merciful, Paul expounds on the characteristics of our Lord: he is as loving as a parent, gracious, redemptive, forgiving, generous, wise, glorious, and more. And not only that – this gracious, redemptive, forgiving, generous, wise, and glorious God has freely chosen us as children. How surprising – the very architect of the universe, entirely of his own volition, has called *you* by name, called *you* a beloved child, marked *you* with the Holy Spirit, made *you* an heir. When next you feel despondent or hopeless, remember, even briefly, that you have been called and marked by the God of love. While that won't solve everything, it *will* help keep things in perspective.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to you to be called a child of God?

What responsibilities come when you're named one of God's heirs?

Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus's name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

In relatively few verses, we get a masterclass in grotesque family dynamics. Herod, contrary to the law, weds his brother's wife, Herodias. John the Baptist calls him out on the scandal, causing Herod some anxiety and Herodias some anger. Herod throws John in prison to limit John's reach and assuage his wife. At a birthday party, Herod's step-daughter, Salome, dances for him and the guests so well, that he feels obliged to offer her anything she wants. In consultation with her still-aggrieved mother, the daughter asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter, which he obliges in order to save face with his party guests. God save us from these... *unhealthy* dynamics!

Fast forward some time: Herod, still likely wracked by fear and guilt from this episode, hears of Jesus, a wandering healer. He assumes that John has been resurrected and his life and power are back under threat. This sets the stage for future interactions between Jesus and the terrified, guilt-wracked, haunted Herod.

Discussion Questions

Put yourself in the position of Herod. How do you feel when you hear about this Jesus working miracles among your people?

When have you seen anger, wrath, and fear spin out of control?