

December 11, 2017

Amos 7:1-9

¹This is what the Lord GOD showed me: he was forming locusts at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king's mowings). ²When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said,

“O Lord GOD, forgive, I beg you!
How can Jacob stand?
He is so small!”

³ The LORD relented concerning this;
“It shall not be,” said the LORD.

⁴This is what the Lord GOD showed me: the Lord GOD was calling for a shower of fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. ⁵Then I said,

“O Lord GOD, cease, I beg you!
How can Jacob stand?
He is so small!”

⁶ The LORD relented concerning this;
“This also shall not be,” said the Lord GOD.

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 never again pass them by;

⁹ the 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.”

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One of the very first sermons I ever wrote and preached was from the Old Testament prophecy of Amos. It came at a time when I was extremely busy, and as occasionally happens despite the best of intentions, I found myself wrestling with Amos in the wee hours of the morning. It was less than ideal, to be sure, but the fatigue I felt in those moments opened me to the intensity of the prophet's words.

Drawn from his life as “a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees,” Amos was called to the most difficult task of delivering bad news in good times. Never had Israel been more prosperous or safe than under the long reign of Jeroboam II in the 8th century BCE. Yet in the midst of their military might and economic prosperity, there was great social injustice and immorality. In a theme echoed throughout the words of the Old Testament prophets, God tires of such injustice and declares that it will no longer be tolerated. God uses the image of a plumb line, an old-fashioned tool that showed when the lines of a building or wall were straight and true, and when they were crooked, or “off.”

As we look anew to the coming of our Lord into this world in the person of Jesus Christ, where do you think a “plumb line” needs to be dropped in your own life, or in the life of your community of faith, to show what is “off” and what is “true?”

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of this day, for its blessings and its challenges. As we navigate this life that you have granted to us, help us to see its beauty and to feel its goodness. Show us where we stray from your “plumb line” of perfect love and justice. In Christ’s name, Amen.