

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 8 – July 19th and 22nd, 2012

Amos 7:10-15 (NIV - 2011)

Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words. For this is what Amos is saying: “Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land.”

Then Amaziah said to Amos, “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom. ”

Amos answered Amaziah, “I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

Dear friends in Christ

In recent years, the modern GPS system and other navigational devices have made the lighthouses of the past obsolete. The old lighthouses are still there, now more as tourist destinations and museums and reminders of our past, but they don't function now as they did years ago. To sailors, lighthouses were extremely important, especially at night or when there was dense fog. The light on the lighthouse was used for navigational purposes to help the ships navigate the coastline so they didn't get lost. The horns of the lighthouse provided another aid for the sailors to warn them of dangers that they were to encounter if they ventured too close to the dangerous rocks or shore line.

Imagine being in the lighthouse on a foggy night, making sure the horn was sounding and the light was shining and a neighbor on the lake comes for a visit and says, “How do you expect us to get any sleep in this neighborhood? That bright light keeps flashing right through our bedroom window. And the horn! Does it have to be so loud? Can't you turn them off just for a while until after we get to sleep?” But if you didn't sound the horn to warn the ships, or shine your light to guide their way, what would happen to the people on those boats? Just because the neighbors complain once in a while, it doesn't mean you can shut down the lighthouse! It is love and concern for those sailors and those boats that would keep the lighthouse operating.

As we gather around God's word today, God gives us the opportunity to see his love and care in sending his people to sound the warning and keep the light shining which lights up the path to Jesus. This is ministry. Ministry is nothing more than God's people serving other people with God's message that is designed to keep them safe eternally. Ministry is God's people sounding the warning about sin so that they can shine the light on Jesus' forgiveness and love. When we understand what ministry truly is and we understand the loving purpose for which God sends his people out into the world, we see God's great love and grace for us his people. And that love and grace leads us to respond to the message that his servants bring. In humble repentance we confess our sin, with joy we believe the promise of forgiveness, and in love, we take the message to heart and turn to serve our fellowman to the glory of our God. Let's turn to the text from Amos today as God encourages us today,

Sermon Theme: Keep Shining the Light!

- 1. People are heading for spiritual destruction**
- 2. God wants all to live forever**

Israel needed the warning sounded. They were sailing directly into rocky shores and were in danger of sinking their ship and drowning spiritually. The problem is that they thought they were doing just fine. They were in a time of economic and political prosperity. Business was booming and they were expanding their borders militarily. But their prosperity had increased the moral, spiritual and religious corruption that was taking place in Israel. Underneath this exterior of prosperity and health was nothing but rot and decay. The list of Israel's sins was great: idolatry, self-righteousness, deceit, arrogance, greed, materialism, oppression of the poor, empty ritualism in worship, sexual immorality, and corruption in the courts. These actions were evidence that the hearts of the people were no longer with their Lord. Their hearts were focused on themselves. Their ritualism in worship and their religious life only gave them the false security that they were right with the Lord when they were not.

Israel had forgotten God's past punishment for their unfaithfulness and his patience was at an end. He sent Amos to proclaim to the people that destruction was only 30-40 years away because of their sin. Amos had some very difficult things to say to the people. If you were to take the time to read the first 6 chapters, you will hear the very frank and stark language that Amos used to tell the people in no uncertain terms that they were wrong in the way they were living and were going to face judgment for it. His main message to Israel is that they were going to face defeat and be sent into exile because they would not turn from their sin nor would they heed God's message to seek him and live.

Now we might look at this today and talk about how politically incorrect it is to talk that way about other people. When talking about sin, you will hear many who claim that it is not for us to judge other people nor to point out any errors in their ways. And if our only purpose is to make ourselves look better than them or to tear them down in the eyes of others, they would be correct. But this was not the purpose for which God sent Amos to his people. Even though Amos had some tough things to say that were a very stinging rebuke for their lifestyles, it was God's love that led him to send that message to Israel through Amos.

Chapter 5 tells us God's purpose in sending Amos to Israel, **“Seek the Lord and live...Seek good not evil, that you may live...perhaps God will have mercy on the remnant of Israel.”** Do you see God's loving purpose in sending Amos to Israel? It was not to push them away, but to draw them back to him. God sending his prophet Amos to Israel shows the deep love that he had for his people. He loved them so much that he wanted them to recognize their sin, repent of it, turn from it and live forever. God was sounding the warning horn to Israel so that they would see the light which would lead them to life.

The reaction is not what we would think. Our text does not give us the reaction of all the people, only that of Amaziah, the priest of Bethel. Yet his response is representative of the rest of Israel. He charged Amos with treason and accused him of conspiracy against the king. But Amaziah didn't wait for Jereboam to respond. He went after Amos himself, even going so far as to imply that Amos was preaching this message for his own personal gain. Essentially, Amaziah and the rest of Israel viewed Amos to be politically incorrect and took his message with that same attitude.

But in his response, Amos lays out what ministry is all about. The Lord sent me...to prophesy to his people. Amos wasn't in it for his own gain. If he had his way about it, he would still be tending sheep back in Tekoa. He didn't make this decision of his own accord to preach against Israel. He wasn't finding some sadistic joy in preaching this message of destruction. God sent his servant to be the spokesman of his message to his people. Throughout Scripture, this is what we see God doing through his servants. He sends his servants to his people. What love and grace of God. He doesn't abandon his servants or leave them all alone. And he sends his servants to his people with the purpose of bringing him the word of love and forgiveness. And in this, we see God's love. This is ministry. God's church is not about being social or political activists. God's church is not here to rid the world of social evils. God sends his servants to serve people with the word of God. This is what ministry is

all about. It is about serving people with the message that they need to hear most. And it is his grace and love that he continues to do this for his people.

This is the message that we need to hear the most. We need to hear the same message that Amos brought to his people. Even though you think on the outside that you are good, on the inside, you are a sinner. Even though you know God and love him, when you do things that go against what God says in his word, you are sinning. When you engage in sexual thoughts or actions outside of the marriage relationship, you are sinning. When you involve yourself in the empty ritualism of worship but show no fruits or faith or response to God's word in your life, you are sinning. When you tell that little white lie that just slipped off your lips you are sinning. When you choose your wants and needs over what God commands, you are sinning. You are separating yourself from God and headed toward the rocks which will bring eternal destruction. No one likes to talk about sin. We don't like to hear about sin. You can try to hide your sins. You can pretend that they won't hurt you. But God says something much different and we need to hear the warning sound. We need God's servants whom he sends to sound the horn that we are in danger of being destroyed eternally.

But note the purpose. It is not to rule every aspect of our lives. God's servants don't preach this message to hold us down or to make us feel bad. God sends his servants to us to bring his message so that we may seek the Lord and live. This is what God wants of you. He wants you to heed the warning horn, recognize your sin, lay it before the Lord and see the light of God's grace and forgiveness. We can say with the Apostle John, **"How great is the love the father has lavished upon us."** God wants us to recognize his grace in sending his servants with his word. And in response, he wants us to take heed of the message his servant brings. I know that it's easy to let personalities get in the way. I know that in this world, our trust in leaders and those in authority has been eroded time and time again because we are dealing with sinful people. But God wants his people to recognize the horn and light that he sends through his servants and rejoice and follow it. Some people go home and grumble and complain to each other because their pastor dared to love them enough to sound the warning about their sin and shine the light on the path to heaven. This is not the reaction that God wants from his people. He wants from them a response of joy and thanks that he loves you enough to send his messengers into his midst to help and assist you on the road to eternal life and point you to the love and grace of Jesus that brings forgiveness for your sins.

But God wants our response to go further. He also wants you to go out and shine the light for others on the path which leads to life. We so often talk about our church and what our church can offer people. But do we talk to other people about what is necessary for salvation? Do we love people enough to be politically incorrect in pointing out that they are on the path to damnation so that we can shine the light for them on the path that leads to life? It's not always easy. It's not always popular. It won't always make you friends in this world. But God sends us out from his church today to carry out his ministry. God sends each one of us out sound the warning about sin and shine the light which points to heaven. In God's eyes, we are all ministers that he sends to serve his people with his word. This is why Christians form the visible assemblies that we call churches—so that we can hear the word, receive the sacraments, and share our faith with sinners who do not yet know him. When God's messengers faithfully preach the pure gospel and administer the sacraments for us as Christ instituted, God wants us to faithfully hear them, honor them, and confess the truth with them. God wants us to sound the horn and ***Keep Shining the Light***. Amen.