

Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 18th, 2022

Reading 1 – Amos 8:4-7

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
and destroy the poor of the land!
"When will the new moon be over," you ask,
"that we may sell our grain,
and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?
We will diminish the ephah,
add to the shekel,
and fix our scales for cheating!
We will buy the lowly for silver,
and the poor for a pair of sandals;
even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!"
The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
Never will I forget a thing they have done!

Amos 8:4-7. Amos was a farmer from Tekoa in the Southern Kingdom of Judah—about twelve miles south of the city of Jerusalem. He was a tender of Sycamore trees and a shepherd—a rough - hewn farmer. After trips to the “big city” he would go back to his countryside, perhaps sit under a tree, and experience an inner restlessness about what he saw in the city. It was a time of relative prosperity and security for the northern and southern Kingdoms—Israel and Judah, and those who were living comfortably had an inflated image of themselves as good people. They would visit their shrines and engage in superficial religious practice but were not invested in living a deeper relationship with God, which demanded that they practice righteousness in all areas of their lives and at the core was the call to care for the poor. Amos went to the king’s shrine at Bethel and called for a more honest, just and caring in the “government.” The king was not shepherding in the manner expected by God. Amos noted that there were poor people starving at the city gate and saw the corruption of the merchants as they “fixed their scales for cheating.” In addition, they were selling the “chaff” of the grain to the poor and engaged in unjust labor practices to exact amounts of money from those who were in debt. Amos also saw people living in the nicer regions (like our suburbs), pampered people, who seemed oblivious to the ills of the country. He also criticized the people for being restless during their worship services, wanting them to be over so they could get back to the business of making money. One day, he realized the restlessness and anger within was God’s way of calling him to speak on God’s behalf. He couldn’t hold in the inner turmoil and began to “roar” anger to his people, threatening them with future disaster if they didn’t change. As was the

case with all the prophets, he was not a popular figure! (Maybe there were some who agreed with his message....)

Comments/Questions: As we look at the prophets of the Hebrew Bible (O.T.), we see that their warnings were not always taken to heart. Sometimes institutions have to deconstruct before they can be rebuilt. Some think our democracy is teetering on the edge of deconstruction right now. Do you agree or disagree? If you were to do a “prophetic critique” of our country today, what do you see in terms of the “power establishment” and the corruption that exists there, the institutional religious establishment, the practice of the laity in terms of discipleship, the elite who live lives that include mansions, yachts with little concern for the less fortunate of the world or issues such as climate change. These are all the domain of those called to be prophets. It’s important to remember, however, that prophets express anger and utter threats because they care about their people, and they have a burning desire to see the Spirit of God come alive in their midst. If they focus on what needs to change, they also hold up a message of hope and often share a poetic vision of the future.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8

R. (cf. 1a, 7b) **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**

Praise, you servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.

Blessed be the name of the LORD
both now and forever.

R. **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**

High above all nations is the LORD;
above the heavens is his glory.

Who is like the LORD, our God, who is enthroned on high
and looks upon the heavens and the earth below?

R. **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**

He raises up the lowly from the dust;
from the dunghill he lifts up the poor
to seat them with princes,
with the princes of his own people.

R. **Praise the Lord who lifts up the poor.**

Reading 2 – 1 Timothy 2:1-8

Beloved:

First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers,
petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,
for kings and for all in authority,
that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life
in all devotion and dignity.

This is good and pleasing to God our savior,
who wills everyone to be saved
and to come to knowledge of the truth.
For there is one God.
There is also one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus,
who gave himself as ransom for all.
This was the testimony at the proper time.
For this I was appointed preacher and apostle
— I am speaking the truth, I am not lying —,
teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray,
lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

1 Tm 2: 1-8: Continuing in Timothy from the discussion that took place last week, we find ourselves now into chapter 2. But before we get into breaking it down, a few words of reminder from our companion Brian Jens should help remind us about the background of these letters. “1 Timothy along with 2 Timothy and Titus are referred to as the “Pastoral Letters.” They deal with how to handle different situations pastorally...1 Timothy in particular helps to show how the church was structured and all the different roles that leaders played.”

And in the spirit of that comment, as we look at this piece of chapter two, we begin to see just what the author believes this church structure and leadership should be about. A few points to highlight would be that, for all in the community, it is a common call that as a church we pray for all human beings (especially the ones in power, so that they may use their influence for good). This means Christians are not an elite group of “saved” people, but human beings in the will of God continuing Christ’s redemptive works here on earth. Second, our saving is both related to our salvation and our saving from ignorance to the truth. The truth being “For there is one God...There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”. And lastly, as a reminder that when you bring this truth, and pray for others to come to know it, do so with the right disposition (“without anger or argument”).

Comments/Questions: In reading this passage, what words or lines stuck out to you, and why? Do you think it is realistic to pray without anger and argument? How so?

Gospel – Luke 16:1-13

Jesus said to his disciples,
"A rich man had a steward
who was reported to him for squandering his property.
He summoned him and said,
'What is this I hear about you?

Prepare a full account of your stewardship,
because you can no longer be my steward.'
The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do,
now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me?
I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg.
I know what I shall do so that,
when I am removed from the stewardship,
they may welcome me into their homes.'
He called in his master's debtors one by one.
To the first he said,
'How much do you owe my master?'
He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.'
He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note.
Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.'
Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?'
He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.'
The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note;
write one for eighty.'
And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently.
"For the children of this world
are more prudent in dealing with their own generation
than are the children of light.
I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth,
so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.
The person who is trustworthy in very small matters
is also trustworthy in great ones;
and the person who is dishonest in very small matters
is also dishonest in great ones.
If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth,
who will trust you with true wealth?
If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another,
who will give you what is yours?
No servant can serve two masters.
He will either hate one and love the other,
or be devoted to one and despise the other.
You cannot serve both God and mammon."

Luke 16:1-13 – In our Gospel story we are still on the road with Jesus and his disciples (being the twelve apostles and other followers) move towards Jerusalem. The story today continues Luke's theme of the character of discipleship, while highlighting the significance of material possessions.

Jesus always had an interesting way of getting points across. In the Gospel story today Jesus is once again criticizing the Pharisees for their lack of understanding of what it means to be a disciple. Instead of directly telling the Pharisees their

problem he uses the parable of the dishonest steward to highlight what effect their material possessions have had on them.

Here's a breakdown of the parable. A wealthy landowner has gotten word that his financial manager is wasting his money. So, the landowner approaches the manager and essentially fires him and tells him to turn over his financial records. At this point, the manager, even though he's fired, still has authority and power until he hands in the record books. So, being "prudent" and recognizing this unique opportunity he calls forward different debtors that owe the landowner rent. For each, the manager gives the debtors lighter fees for their services. By doing this the manager has essentially gotten a favor in return from the debtors. By giving the debtors a break in their fees the manager guarantees a favor in return after he stops being the manager. Once, the manager is released from his duties he will be in need of material things. So, the manager can cash in that favor from the debtors. In the end the landowner compliments the manager by calling him "prudent."

The second part of the reading explains the purpose of the parable. Jesus tells everyone to make friends with "dishonest wealth." Dishonest wealth is seen as any material possession that could lead one to dishonesty. It should come as no surprise that all our material possessions will not come with us to heaven. Those possessions will, as Jesus puts it, "fail." They will cease to have any importance after we die. So, how does one become "friends" with dishonest wealth? The answer seems contrary to the character of the dishonest steward, which is *almsgiving*. Jesus is trying to promote almsgiving as a good characteristic of good discipleship. While the dishonest steward used his position and authority to buy himself a favor in return with his debtors he does in a sense practice almsgiving. So, the best thing we can do with the material possessions entrusted to us is to practice almsgiving with those possessions.

The rest of the passage seems pretty straightforward. If someone is trustworthy with small things, they can be trusted with more important things. If someone can't be trustworthy with small things or "dishonest wealth" how they can be expected to be trusted with more important things, like "true wealth?" In this sense Jesus is calling true wealth the gifts of the kingdom, or the characteristics that define what a disciple should be (For example trustworthiness. If you aren't a good steward of money, am I going to trust you with my secrets?) So, in the end Jesus paints the picture quite clearly, you can't serve both God and material possessions. You must choose one or the other.

Side Note: The origin of the word *mammon* is interesting. Mammon is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word "mammon." The root word of mammon in Aramaic is a common word we use often: "amon" or "amen," which literally means "I believe" or "I trust." In Aramaic when the letter "m" is put in front of a word it transforms a verb into a noun. So, amon with the "m" now "mammon" can be translated literally from Aramaic to mean "the trusty stuff." We might think

“mammon” is money, but Jesus could have been mentioning that mammon is any material possession that we regard as trustworthy.

Comments/Questions: It is interesting following this passage we see the religious leaders who Jesus’ is talking to they “sneered” at him because of their love of money. Based on your own life experience and the way you handle your possessions how would you react to what Jesus is saying?