



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 5
Proper 10 (C)
July 10, 2022

[RCL] Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82; Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Amos 7:7-17

The prophet Amos is known for siding with the powerless against the powerful. He prophesied during the 8th century BCE, during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah and King Jeroboam in Israel. This is the time in Ancient Israel's history when the kingdom was divided: Israel in the north, Judah in the south. Amos, called from his work as a shepherd to bring the word of God to King Jeroboam, uses the imagery of a plumb line, which measures the structural integrity of a wall, to describe what YHWH is doing by sending him. God is measuring their worship, and, as we hear in other parts of this book, taking note of their oppression of the poor.

YHWH finds Israel wanting in these areas and sends Amos to warn Israel of their coming defeat and exile. But King Jeroboam will not hear of it. He sends Amaziah, a priest of Bethel, to send Amos away. Amos refuses to budge and shares his prophecy. While he is neither a “prophet nor a prophet’s son” (v. 14), he knows God called him, and can only speak what God has told him to speak.

By the end of the 8th century BCE, Israel is defeated by the Assyrians, placed in exile throughout the Assyrian empire, and the region is purposely populated by people from other lands conquered by the Assyrians.

- In this passage, Amos uses the image of a plumb line to describe how God measures the structures of their society, both in terms of their religious integrity and socioeconomic oppression. What critique might a modern-day Amos bring to this country, and this Episcopal Church?
- Amos is not from a line of prophets. He is a shepherd and “a dresser of sycamore trees” (v. 14). While he is likely to be a relatively well-off person, he is not a member of the royal court nor part of the religious elite. He offers his prophecy as an outsider. Can you think of a time when you or someone you know felt the need to offer critique as an outsider to a system? How did you feel, and what kind of reaction did that criticism receive?

Psalm 82

The Psalms are unique in the Biblical canon. It is one of the few books of the Bible comprised entirely of poetry, and it is intended to be sung. On its pages are the full range of human emotions: joy, exultation, horror, sadness, grief, thanksgiving, loneliness, and so much more. They express ways of understanding God.

Today's psalm offers a way of understanding God in a polytheistic culture. At the very beginning, we hear of God as part of a divine council. It is important to keep in mind when reading the Bible that, much like in our own society, there was a great deal of religious variety in the ancient Near East. Other gods are mentioned throughout the Bible, from Baal and Moloch to Artemis and Zeus. This psalm is making the claim that only God brings justice among all other gods, and other gods will fall away, leaving only the God of Israel to judge the nations. This is closely linked to the Amos reading, where God judges Israel for its oppression of the poor.

- The central claim of this psalm is that justice comes from God. Where have you seen this idea inspire the work of change? Have you ever seen this idea block the work of change?
- Living in a religiously diverse place is something many Episcopalians experience. If you were to write a psalm that acknowledges this religious diversity, what image would you use to describe it?

Colossians 1:1-14

This letter, which claims Paul as an author, is written to the church in Colossae. We hear in this introduction that Paul and Timothy heard that the church here has become a faithful and love-filled community of believers, thanks to the work of Epaphras. Colossae was a haven for mystery cults at the time this letter was written, and the intent of the author is to stave off any wrong ideas about who Jesus was, is, and will be.

The introduction of this letter focuses on three things: thankfulness, the importance of unceasing prayer, and the efficacy of the wisdom and strength of God in enabling believers to do good works and live worthy lives. It contains a beautiful prayer for the community at Colossae (vv 9 - 14) containing these themes. In this letter, prayer becomes a connection between the authors, the recipients, and the church as a whole, through God and the saints. It encourages gratitude as the posture of the Christian and reminds the readers of Jesus' work of rescue and liberation for each of them.

- Concern about how communities of Christians understand Jesus comes up repeatedly in the New Testament writings. Who is Jesus to you?
- This passage links prayer, thankfulness, and good works. What do you see as the relationship between these things, in this reading and in your own life?

Luke 10:25-37

The parable of the Good Samaritan is well known and much loved. Jesus tells this parable in response to questions from what the NRSV Bible calls a "lawyer." The original Greek in this passage connotes someone well-versed in the Torah. Here, the lawyer challenges Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal

life?” Jesus points the lawyer to the Law, and his answer is accepted. He tries to catch Jesus up one more time: “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus offers a parable in response.

The parable of the Good Samaritan tells the story of a man, traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho, who is beset by robbers, beaten, and left on the side of the road. A priest and then a Levite pass him by, and he is helped and cared for by a Samaritan. The tendency of modern Christians is to think of the Samaritan as a member of an oppressed group offering help to someone they don’t know. But this doesn’t quite capture the feeling of enmity that existed between Jewish people and the Samaritans. Both claim lineage back to Moses and both use the Torah as the source of religious observance. Where Samaritans are descended from the northern kingdom of Israel, who had Samaria as their main center of worship, the Jewish people are descended from Judah, which had Jerusalem as their main center of worship. Samaritans weren’t any more or less oppressed than the Jewish people living under Roman occupation.

What we have here, then, is a story of a Samaritan crossing boundaries by not crossing the road. He uses the money and social position he has to care for an enemy. It’s as if a Ukrainian person were to stop along the side of the road to care for a Russian person. It is unexpected, and, if enacted in real life, is violence-disrupting.

The lawyer realizes that the neighbor is the Samaritan but can’t bring himself to actually say the word. Jesus tells him to do what the Samaritan does. We are called to do the same.

- In this passage, the Samaritan is “moved with pity” to act, as the lawyer observes, with “mercy.” The term translated as “moved with pity” could also be translated as “to feel compassion.” In what ways do compassion and mercy work together?
- When we read stories like these, we want to identify with the person who Jesus holds up as an exemplar. Think about each character in the parable: the robbers, the priest, the Levite, the man, the Samaritan, and the innkeeper. Which of these characters have you been in your life? Which characters have you met in your life? If you were ever the Samaritan, how did you decide to act?

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