

8th Sunday after Pentecost – Year B
July 26, 2009
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Amos 7:10-17
Pastor Paul Horn

Jesus wants you to listen to all of the Scriptures

I. Words you don't want to hear...

II. Words you need to hear...

10 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. 11 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.'" 12 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. 13 Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." 14 Amos answered Amaziah, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.' 16 Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, "'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.' 17 "Therefore this is what the LORD says: "'Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile, away from their native land.'"

If you are a child or teenager there are words you don't want to hear, "You're not my friend anymore." "No, I will not go out with you to the movies this weekend." "You're grounded for the weekend - you're not going anywhere." As you get older, the words you don't want to hear often have more serious implications: from your doctor, "The test came back positive." From your employer, "We're gonna' have to let you go." From your bank, "I'm sorry, but we can't loan you the money." From your commanding officer, "You're PCSing to Fort Drum... in December... when it's nice and cold." Words you don't want to hear...

Imagine for a moment.... that you are an officer in the armed forces, a lieutenant colonel. As such you enjoy a high social standing, a larger salary than most, and with your position you exercise a great deal of authority and power. How would you feel if someone told you that your commander-in-chief would die, your nation would be overtaken by an enemy nation, the citizens of your country would be exiled and all of your power and prestige, even your family, would all be taken away from you? You'd tell that guy to hit the road! What business do you have here? This is the United States of America!

That's exactly how a man in our story felt. Amaziah wasn't an Army officer. But he was employed by King Jeroboam II and enjoyed a large salary and much power. He served as priest in the city of Bethel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Remember that after King Solomon's death, the kingdom was split into two parts; Israel to the north and Judah to the south - each having their own king and priests. But the LORD had to send his prophet Amos to prophesy against the leaders and people of the northern kingdom because of their many gross sins. What were those many gross sins?

Jeroboam II reigned 41 years (2Kings 14:23-29). The Bible tells us that he did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam I, which he had caused Israel to commit. Jeroboam (the first) had fashioned two golden calves and set one up in the city of Dan and the other in Bethel and said to the people, "Here are your gods who led you out of Egypt." (1Kings 12:25ff) Sounds a lot like what the Israelites pulled at Mount Sinai, doesn't it? The king also built shrines to these gods on the high places (hilltops etc) and instituted a festival during which the people sacrificed offerings to the calves, which just happened to coincide with the Feast of Tabernacles which was observed in Judah. And now Jeroboam II followed in his footsteps.

And so the LORD sent Amos to tell Amaziah and King Jeroboam that they were clearly wrong. They had disobeyed God's commands and were not repentant. Therefore, God wanted to inform them that he would indeed punish them for their blatant unbelief and rejection of the LORD as the one true God. The king would die and Israel would indeed go into exile, away from their homeland. But Amaziah didn't want to hear those words. And so he told Amos in vs12, "Don't patronize me! Get out of here! You're not even from the northern kingdom. You're from Judah, the south! What business do you have here?" In vs13 the priest said to the prophet, "Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom." Amaziah was more concerned about being offended than he was about offending his God. It's also sad that Amaziah was a priest in the town of Bethel. Bethel in Hebrew means the house of God... but it was far from it.

In vs16 Amos quotes Amaziah as saying, "Do not prophesy against Israel." In the Hebrew he literally says, "Do not flow against Israel," implying that Amos' words were like a flood of water that sweeps a person away. In vs10 Amaziah says, "The land cannot bear all his words." In other words, "The people cannot stand up and endure your verbal abuse." We don't want to hear it, Amos!

But Amos was determined. He did not back down and say, "You're right. I should go. Sorry for offending you." Instead he replied with the truth, even if it stung, "First of all, the LORD sent me. And now, this is what the LORD says to you... Because you have refused to listen, your wife will become a prostitute in this city (because you will be gone and she will have no one to support her), and your sons and daughters will be killed. Your land will be divided up, and you yourself will die in a foreign land (literally, unclean land - nation of Assyria). And the people of Israel will certainly become captives in exile, far from their homeland." You will lose everything because you have rejected the LORD.

The problem the Israelites had was they were complacent. They just didn't care what God's prophets said. They didn't care about God's Word. Amos said in 6:1ff, "Woe to you who are complacent, to you who feel secure. You sleep on expensive beds and sit on expensive couches, you strum away on your harps, eat choice steaks, drink wine by bowlful, and not care at all about the condition of the church or your relationship with the LORD." (my paraphrase) They just didn't care what the LORD said.

Could it be that we at times are complacent, that is, we're content with our situation here at Faith Lutheran, we're content with our spiritual lives and refuse to see a need for spiritual growth? Are we apathetic, that is uninterested and not at all concerned with God's house, the ministry here at Faith Lutheran, or our own spiritual growth? Look around...the church is full, it's clean, you have bulletins and hymnals in your hands, the lights are on, the air conditioning is running, we still have a pastor, new guests keep coming... somebody must be doing something. Yet here we sit, unconcerned and uninterested about what God has to say to us. Could it be that we are more concerned about the golden calves we've set up for ourselves than we are about God's Word and Sacraments? "But pastor, I don't have any idols at my house!" Oh, but I know we all do, and I have to admit you'd find them at my home too. The golden calves; i.e. the stuff in our homes, in our garages, our yards and cars. In our hearts we set apart our stuff and our time and our money as more important and worthy of more attention than our God and his Word and Sacraments as he demands of us. Yes, we bow down to the gods of materialism and pride and selfishness every day.

And the LORD says to us, "Woe to you! You will die!" That's true for all of us, isn't it? For all of us have sinned. All of us are guilty. As he said to Amaziah, he says to you and me, "You deserve to die in an unclean place." That's what God says we deserve for our sins, to suffer forever in the unclean place, the place reserved for the devil and all his angels, eternally separated from our LORD and his love. Our sins make us unclean, unholy, worthy of death.

I think the same is true for us as it was with Amaziah. We can't endure those words. We don't want to undergo the finger-pointing from God. We don't like to hear that we've done wrong, that we are wrong and unfaithful, that we have set up our own golden calves, that we are guilty of spending more time fretting about our stuff than our spiritual lives and the advancement of God's kingdom. And like a tidal wave, those words overwhelm us. Those are words we don't always want to hear, but we need to. Because when we hear those words, we acknowledge our sin, and turn to God and seek his forgiveness. And it is equally important that after we acknowledge those words, that we next hear these words from our God, "You are forgiven!"

Those are words we like to hear, just as, "The test came back negative," "She came through surgery just fine," "You have a healthy baby," "We're giving you a raise," "You're hired," "Honey, I'm ok over here in Afghanistan." But how much more do we

love to hear these words from our Savior! (2Cor 8:9), “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” We set him and his Word aside and raise up our golden calves, yet he, by his grace, his undeserved love for us, set aside the comforts of heaven for us, to suffer the pains of that unclean place called hell. He set aside his power to die. The curse remains, “Woe to you who sin, you will die!” Jesus stepped in and took that threat of punishment away from you and me by dying in our place. He became poor so that you might be rich. Indeed you are rich if you have Jesus as your Savior, if his sufferings are yours, if his death is yours, if his resurrection is yours.

My dear friends, there is no “if.” These blessings are most certainly yours because you have been baptized into Christ. By washing you with water and the Word the Holy Spirit has forgiven you of your sins of materialism by covering you with Jesus’ blood. You have been saved from the death you earned for yourself. You have been saved from God’s wrath, from hell’s fire and have been given heaven as your inheritance. Yes, we love to hear these words anytime we witness a baptism here at Faith, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We love to hear these words from our God spoken by our pastor, “I forgive you all your sins!” We love to hear these words, “This blood and body was given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins and I offer it to you now to eat and drink for the salvation of your soul.” We leave the Lord’s Table with our minds at rest. We leave those doors with our hearts at peace with God. For we know that no longer are we headed to an unclean land – but to the Promised Land, where we will live holy, pure and without sin. Words we love to hear!

How will you respond to these words? With words God expects to hear from us; with deeds and thoughts and attitudes his eyes will see. Words our God loves to hear: “Lord Jesus, help me to tear down the golden calves I so often set up in my heart. Help me to instead put you and your Word as my top priority each day.” Words our God loves to hear: “Lord Jesus, help me to reevaluate my possessions, “What do I need” versus “What do I want...” Help me to give back to you the best and first of the material treasures you have given me so that your kingdom may grow in this congregation and Lutheran congregations around the world. Help me to be a faithful manager of your Word so that your Scriptures will strengthen me and guide me in faithful stewardship of my time and my abilities here at this congregation, in my home and community. Help me to discover what I can do to help further the spread of the gospel message to those who are unchurched, because they need to hear it just as much as I do.” These are the words and attitudes we will display to thank our Lord Jesus for saving us.

Words we need to hear.... A wife needs her husband to say to her, “Honey, I love you.” Children need their parents to say to them, “We love you.” As children of God we need to hear our Father say to us, “You have sinned.” We also need him to say, “I love you and I forgive you through my Son Jesus.” May all the words of our God through his holy Scripture keep us strong in the one true faith until life eternal. Amen.

