

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM
July 16, 2017

Amos 7:10-15 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 the son of a prophet, 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.'

"The World Needs Another Amos"

Ok, be honest. Raise your hand if the first thing you thought of when you heard the name Amos was cookies. It's ok. The Prophet Amos who delivered God's Word 750 years before Jesus isn't probably a household name. Wally Amos gained a reputation for his cookie baking skills when he was an agent. He used to send cookies to celebrities hoping to get a chance to meet them and then sign them to his agency. In 1975 with \$25,000 in funding from the singers Marvin Gaye and Helen Reddy, he opened his own cookie stand on a busy corner in Hollywood. Within a few years, his famous cookies were all over the country.

But you're not in church today to learn about cookies. Or cookie bakers. We are here to learn God's Word. And to do that we can learn from the prophet named Amos. To say the Prophet Amos had a tough job is a big understatement. He had an unpopular message and an unfriendly audience. Today as we deepen our understanding of who Amos is and expand our appreciation of what God called him to do, we will see the world needs more people just like Amos. God wants you and me to be more like the prophet Amos.

These verses from Amos chapter seven begin with a confrontation. There was a rival prophet who was upset by the message he heard from Amos. Amaziah was the one put in charge of the worship center in the city of Bethel by King Jeroboam. So he immediately alerts the king to the bad news that is leaving such a bad taste in his mouth: "**Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words.**" (Amos 7:10) It's one thing to find the message of Amos rude. But Amaziah felt these words went beyond just offensive and trouble. They were, in his opinion, downright treacherous.

And, to be honest, it's not hard to see why Amaziah was so upset by the message of Amos. He summarized it this way: "**Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will surely go**

into exile, away from their native land.” (Amos 7:11) Not exactly a pleasant, happy message at all. He might not have been 100% accurate in retelling Amos’ prophecies up to this point, but he’s got the main point. The king and his royal family are in trouble. The whole country will end up being defeated and the people taken away to a foreign land if things don’t change. Not an appetizing possibility at all. No one wants to hear it. No one wants that message to spread. Amaziah wants to put a stop to it as soon as possible.

You’re probably aware that Christianity faced many obstacles in the first few hundred years after Jesus. Many Christians faced extreme accusations and threats to their lives. But what you may not know is that the situation has not improved in the least in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent fourteen years in Communist prisons for preaching Jesus Christ crucified. When a ransom was paid to the Communist authorities, he was released and came to the free West. Wurmbrand founded Jesus to the Communist World (later renamed The Voice of the Martyrs), to make the West aware of the plight of persecuted Christians. And in December 2010, Pope Benedict XVI stated, “At present, Christians are the religious group which suffers most from persecution on account of its faith.”¹

Of all of the recent developments in our world, one thing we know is we can be sure we will always get a reaction. You can share information with people half-way around the world on a variety of different platforms so it can be consumed on all kinds of devices. And you know people will have a response. You can guarantee they will share their feelings. And if you spend anytime online, you can predict with a reasonable degree of certainty that the response won’t be mild or thoughtful or moderate. The truth is that the message of Christianity will always make some people uncomfortable. It always has and it always will. No one wants to hear bad news. And none of us want to be the ones who have to share that bad news. So we back down. Or at least we try to blend in. We don’t want to stand out so much that we become a target. It’s uncomfortable to bring the bad news. But we don’t want to become bad news ourselves.

Which brings us back to the Prophet Amos. When Amaziah tattles on Amos to the king, when Amaziah tries to push him around and get him out of the country, Amos stands his ground. Amos might be taking the threats seriously. He might feel endangered personally. But he doesn’t turn timid or go silent. That’s because he knows the difference between being commissioned by God and selecting service for himself.

To become another Amos, you and I need to come to grips with the way we handle bad news from God. There are plenty of bad examples recently of people who didn’t handle bad news very well. In our country we are still dealing with the fall out from Enron, the subprime mortgage scandal, and the financial crisis that led to the Great Recession. No one in the business world is particularly shocked that there was greed or corruption going on. But the shockingly tragic part was the failure to do anything about it. Why didn’t more people speak up? There was a business culture that punished bad news. Why didn’t more

¹ White, Hilary. “World peace impossible without religious freedom: Pope Benedict.” *LifeSiteNews.com* [Dec 21, 2010]

people listen and act when the few brave whistle blowers stood up? No one had the courage to deal with the uncomfortable truth.

That brings us back to Amos. In the first few verses of Amos chapter 7, God reveals to Amos that he is planning to send a devastating swarm of locusts in judgment against Israel. Amos pleads that Israel won't be able to withstand this harsh judgment, so God relents. Then God promises to send a fire in judgment against the entire land. Again Amos pleads for mercy and again God relents. Then God showed Amos a plumb line. If you aren't familiar with ancient building techniques, a plumb line helps you see if any building is straight. If a building is out of plumb, leaning one way or the other, it is dangerous. God tells Amos that he sees the hearts of his people are out of line. It will only end in destruction. God pledges that his patience is running out, he won't spare his judgement any longer.

Amos didn't think of being God's bearer of bad news as optional. He had to do it. If he didn't warn the people, they would just continue in their sin and unbelief. They would end up in spiritual ruin. Our world needs another Amos. Not that it's fun to bring bad news. Not that anyone is fighting for that job. But when God's people turn timid because people get offended, when we go silent because people get upset or feel threatened, there's more at stake than just not doing our job. We aren't just turning our backs on God, we're turning our backs on souls. We're running away from providing the only solution available for those souls.

What souls face, what every human being needs to come to grips with is very bad news. And it's worse than a brand like Famous Amos losing its great reputation. It is much more dangerous than a company spiraling into collapse or the economy cratering. What is at stake is the spiritual, eternal welfare of souls. To be another Amos you and I need to direct this message first of all to our own hearts.

There's a message there for people who think of themselves as inside God's favor. Before we turn our attention to the people on the outside, toward Muslims and toward people who ridicule Christians and people who are offended at the harsh truth of God's Word, we need to be Amos to our own hearts. You and I need to address a faulty assumption. We think of ourselves as God's special people just like the Israelites did in the time of Amos. Since we are God's special people, God will approve of what we do no matter what we do. So we can feel secure in who we are no matter what we do. We need to take to heart God's bad news. Your heart is out of line. Your heart has gone in the wrong direction. Leaving your heart to keep going the way it is will be dangerous for your soul.

Take to heart God's bad news. Take it to heart not as a personal attack but as a heartfelt warning. It's a warning because God doesn't want your soul to end in destruction. God has something better for you. God has something better than your stubborn rebelliousness. God has a solution. Only by seeing the seriousness of the danger, can you appreciate the beauty of God's solution.

The only person in history whose heart has always been perfectly in line with God's is Jesus Christ. Jesus was the only one who never deserved God's fiery judgment. But Jesus endured the fires of hell on the cross to suffer your punishment. Jesus never had to worry about

God's destructive judgment because of anything he did wrong. But on the cross, the destruction that consumed Jesus spared sinners.

The world needs another Amos wherever God's people gather together. So when you are looking for a messenger from God, it is absolutely essential to find someone who is willing to speak bad news as well as good news, point out your sins so he can point to your need for a Savior. But we need more people to be like Amos, not just pastors and teachers and missionaries. God needs you to be his Amos. The messengers the world needs aren't people like Amaziah who get approval by telling people what they want to hear. They aren't the ones who attract huge audiences and get countless likes because their message is so appealing. God has commissioned you and placed you in your life's relationships. He commissioned you for a reason. To speak his message of truth as a grandmother or caring uncle, a teacher or student, a cashier or business owner.

Faithfulness to teaching and applying God's truth is the chief requirement of anyone commissioned by God. It's not about being judgmental, but sharing God's judgment. It's not about winning an argument, but revealing God's solution. The key to faithfulness to God's commission is getting to the truth. Truth #1: I am a sinner. Truth #2: God sent a Savior for sinners. When you speak the truth, you can speak with authority regardless of your training or how many initials you have behind your name.

God wants more faithful messengers like Amos. God wants you and me to embrace the bad news of judgment, not because we don't like people, but because God wants to warn souls in serious danger. Coming to grips with bad news opens up the possibility for God's remedy. And you can stand courageously in your relationship with your Savior. Your God has given you His own Son to be your Savior. Your God has adopted you into his family through faith in Jesus. All the threats and all the insults in the world can't rob you of who you are in Jesus Christ. So be like Amos. Bring the bad news. And bring others into a relationship with their Savior. Amen.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him. Amen.