

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday from July 10/11, 2021

“God's Plumb Line”

How many of you are feeling a little off kilter today? Like you need to be recentered? Like you need something like a plumb line to straighten you up? I know I feel that way most days.

Well, you are in the right place, because through God's Word and Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit should put us back in plumb with Jesus and the cross.

In our first lesson, we encounter an image of a plumb line that God shows Amos in a vision. Amos, herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees from Judah, is to go and set the Israelites straight. The people of Israel and Judah were in a divided kingdom. They didn't get along and they couldn't agree on much, especially where to worship. God felt the Israelites were out of plumb... that they lost their way. They had turned to idols and have neglected justice for the poor.

And for those who have done engineering and construction, we know that when a wall is out of plumb, it will eventually fall unless some sort of correction happens.

My only experience with an actual plumb line is when my son Ezra wanted me to paint high school, college, and NBA three-point lines on our basketball court in Oregon. We got all the measurements online, and in order to get it right I had to drop a plumb line from the center of the hoop to the ground. I put a nail into the pavement, tied a string on it, and made arcs around the court with spray paint. Who says you don't use geometry after high school? I didn't want my kids practicing from the wrong distances.

God calls ordinary people to be prophets like Amos and John the Baptist in our lessons for today... and you and me. When things go sideways in our world, which is every day, God calls prophets to speak a word of truth, or to make a piece of art, or to sit silently in protest to an injustice happening in our world.

Some prophets that come to mind for me are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was one of the few German Pastors to speak out against Hitler. It

cost him his life. I think of an artist in Oregon who makes giant works of art out of plastics found in the ocean. It takes semis to transfer this art. I think of Malala Youfsazi, an education activist in Pakistan, who almost died when a bomb exploded outside her school, She became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

As I said, things were going sideways in Israel. It was a time of great prosperity. King Jereboam, King of the north, set up two Golden calves, one in Bethel and one in Dan so people could go and worship there instead of going down to Jerusalem in the despised southern kingdom. And you know what happens when a golden calf is set up in the Bible.

God sent fires, foreign armies, and locust plagues, to get the Israelites to repent, but the people still wouldn't return to God.

Amos wasn't looking for a new career. He just wanted to go about his daily vocation as a herdsman. But God called. God wanted Amos to deliver this message to King Jereboam and warn him that he was facing his own death if he didn't return to God.

Amaziah, a national priest who didn't like Amos talking that way about his boss, and who obviously was corrupted by being in the political system, went to Jereboam and told him what Amos said, "That Jereboam would die by the sword and the Israelites would go into exile." Amaziah went back to Amos and told him to take is prophecy to his own country. They should have listened to Amos... the Israelites eventually fell and were exiled.

We are in times of great prosperity in our country economically. Most of us have an abundance. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. We to place our trust in things other than God... like in ourselves, or other humans, or in stuff. What will it take to change our ways? Has the pandemic changed us?

In our Gospel, we also see our human condition on full display. It's all there... regrets, grudges, guilt, lust, shame, and murder. How many of you are harboring grudges right now? It got the best of Herodias, King Herod's wife, as she held a grudge against John the Baptist. John was beheaded at Herod's birthday party. John spoke

truth to power... calling out the illegal marriage of Herod to his brother's wife... while his brother was still alive. He basically stole his brother's wife.

Then Jesus comes along preaching a similar message of repent and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Herod thinks that John the Baptist has been resurrected from the dead.

Our human condition follows us everywhere... in our homes, in our heads, in our governments, in our churches, at work. These lessons should remind us of our need for daily repentance and to listen to voices that call for equality and justice.

But thanks be to God for Jesus Christ... our plumb line. Ephesians says, God chose us in Jesus Christ before foundation of the World. Like the children's sermon, you are chosen. By grace, we have an inheritance waiting for us. This inheritance is a free gift of God. You can't earn it. We don't deserve it, but God still chooses to give it.

Even though we all have the sins of Herod and Herodias in us, God still loves us and forgives us, especially when we admit our sin and have a broken heart over what we have done or left undone. God will continue to send prophets, and pastors, and teachers, and neighbors and even you to share Jesus' kingdom of justice with the world.

Let us have eyes to see and ears to hear the hard word that convicts us and the good news of the Gospel to free us. Amen.