

Eighth Sunday in Pentecost  
August 3, 2003  
Amos 7:10-15

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

**When the Prophet of the LORD Speaks...**

*...don't reject the truth because it hurts  
...don't judge the message by the man  
...do listen, examine, repent, and obey*

*NIV Amos 7:10 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.'*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus,

A good example is always preferable to a bad example, but there's something to be learned from a bad example, too. A bad example shows us what *not* to do. This morning's Old Testament lesson brings us a bad example of how to obey the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. The meaning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment ("Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy"), according to Dr. Luther in our catechism, is that "we should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." King Jeroboam II was not glad to hear and learn God's Word. Jeroboam ruled the Northern Kingdom (Israel) for most of the years from 800 to 750 B.C. He ruled a long time—41 years—and he reigned at a time when Israel was quite prosperous and he expanded Israel's territory. Yet the Bible summarizes his reign this way: "**He did evil in the eyes of the LORD.**" (2 Kgs. 14:24) Like the other kings of the Northern Kingdom before him, Jeroboam II did nothing about the idolatry that had been introduced into Israel by his namesake, the first King Jeroboam. The golden calves that the first King Jeroboam had erected in the cities of Bethel and Dan were still being worshiped more than a century later when the second King Jeroboam reigned.

In today's First Lesson, however, it's clear that despite their idolatry the LORD still loved the people of the Northern Kingdom and wanted them to repent. He still loved King Jeroboam and he wanted him to repent. That's why the LORD called the prophet Amos and sent him from the village of Tekoa in the Southern

Kingdom to the city of Bethel, the center of the idolatrous calf worship, in Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam's reaction to the prophesying of Amos, though, is a textbook case of how not to respond when the prophet of the LORD speaks. This morning, let's learn something from Jeroboam's bad example. Let's learn first: **When the Prophet of the LORD Speaks...**

### 1. ...don't reject the truth because it hurts

It says here, *"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. 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.'"* Amaziah was a priest who served idol worshipers at Bethel. You don't really expect that he'll be thrilled by what Amos has to say. But he couches his opposition to Amos in terms that make him sound patriotic and loyal, concerned that a false prophet was doing damage to his king and his country. Had Amos said what Amaziah accused him of saying? For the most part, he had. In the verses just before this section, Amos revealed a vision the LORD had given him. He prophesied, *"Then the LORD said, 'Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.'"* Amos hadn't specifically said that Jeroboam would die by the sword. The fact is, Jeroboam died a natural death. But Amos had said that the LORD would rise with his sword against the house of Jeroboam and that did happen. Jeroboam's son, King Zechariah, reigned for only six months before he was assassinated. And Amos had used the "E" word—exile. He said on God's behalf in chapter 5, **"Therefore I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD**—and that's precisely what happened only 30 years later.

It hurt to hear those words. The violent end to a dynasty. The violent end of a kingdom. Death, destruction, exile. Have you ever heard the phrase, **"Prepare to meet your God"**? It comes from this book of Amos (4:12). But no words were ever more true and—besides—there was a loving purpose behind these hurtful words that issued from the mouth of God's prophet. Israel as a nation was headed for destruction and the people individually were headed for eternal destruction. God sent Amos to issue a painful wake-up call. The Israelites had their summer homes and their gourmet foods and their wine and expensive lotions, but they were not pained by their sins, so God sent Amos to inflict some pain. They didn't think it was a big deal that they worshiped golden calves instead of going to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, but their substitute gods and substitute places of worship angered God. They shrugged off the rampant corruption in Israel and participated in the oppression of the poor and needy, but that didn't pain them either. This was a country anesthetized to the damning effects of sin, so sent Amos to try to bring them out of it.

God still speaks words that inflict pain today. Those words are here in the Bible. He calls us sinners, slaves to sin, in fact. He tells us that the wages of sin is death. He stops our mouths when we try to protest that we're righteous and he declares that we've all fallen short. Due to our insufficient righteousness, he says, we can have no expectation of a glorious future.

Why does God talk to us like that? In short, because it's the truth and because he loves us. He wants us in heaven one day, so he doesn't sugarcoat things. He tells it like it really is. He shows us our sin in all its damnable ugliness. He shows us the futility of our efforts to save ourselves. And then, when we've despaired of our own righteousness, he speaks a promise to us. He points us to the cross of Jesus, where God's justice and love met. Our sins condemn us, but at the cross Jesus suffered our condemnation. He lifted the curse. He bore our punishment. All who look to the cross of Jesus in faith find a gracious God. Only someone who's believed the painful message of sin and damnation can appreciate the healing words of full forgiveness in Christ.

The blunt force of the words of Amos accounted for only part of Jeroboam's reluctance to listen to him. Another factor was that Jeroboam and his priest, Amaziah, didn't seem to have any respect for the man, Amos. Bad examples, once again, they teach us to judge the message by the man.

## **2. ...don't judge the message by the man**

We read here, *"Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.'"* Amaziah regarded the prophet Amos as a trespassing freeloader, as a prophet-for-hire with no right to open his mouth in the Northern Kingdom. So he told him to get out. It's true, Amos was from Judah. And he probably wasn't all that polished and impressive. After all, the man was just off the farm. He tended sheep and gathered figs. He didn't have prophetic training. He didn't have prophetic blood. But what this shepherd/farmer did have was a call from God. The LORD called him. The LORD told him where to go and the LORD told him what to say. To say, "He's not from these parts and I'm not impressed by him" is to judge the message by the man.

Last week's synod convention in Watertown, Wisconsin, reminded me that our pastors come in all shapes and sizes. But by the rich grace of God, what our pastors have in common is a humble confidence in the Word. But if there's ever a generation that needs to be reminded not to judge the message by the man, it's this generation. We live in a time when the medium frequently is the message, when the person speaking is often perceived to be more important than what he says. It's a rare congregation that when looking for a pastor says, "Just give us a man who's faithful to the Word." It's more common to add requirements that, had they been in force 800 years before Christ, would very likely have prevented the prophet Amos from going to Bethel. But it's interesting that the Bible doesn't tell

us that Amos was a dynamic speaker or that he had great people skills or that he was a genius at organization. What we do know is that Amos was unflinchingly faithful to the LORD who sent him. He spoke the word of the LORD unaltered, unapologetically.

As a result, Amos wasn't much fazed by Amaziah's expulsion order. He answered, *"I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of the sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"* The prophet took refuge in his call. Amos wasn't free-lancing in the Northern Kingdom. He wasn't experimenting with a change of careers. He was here because the LORD called him to do this work. He was here to call people from death to life. He was here to call people from unbelief to faith in the coming Messiah. His background meant nothing. The fact that he was more familiar with sheep than with the etiquette of royal court of Israel meant nothing. God sent him and God was speaking through him. Time after time, Amos says in his book, **"This is what the LORD says."**

Now if that's the case, that the words of the prophet Amos are actually the words of the LORD because the LORD is speaking through him, then that has some implications. Then these are not words to be despised, but they are words to be gladly heard and gladly learned.

### **3. ...do: listen, examine, repent, and obey**

**"How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!"** Those are the words of King David in Psalm 139. But how rare that attitude is! How precious can God's words and thoughts be to us, if we can barely squeeze a few moments with the Word into our day? Too often the competition for our time and attention wins out. Or fatigue gets the best of us and our good intentions to immerse ourselves in the Word fail to translate into actions. That's why the prophet says in the next verse after this section, **"Now, then, hear the word of the LORD."**

Passages like "Prepare to meet your God" understandably don't engender much joy. They inflict pain. But the inflicting of that pain has a higher goal, namely, to cause us to see our great need of a Savior. Then it really means something when Amos says like he does later in this book, **"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent."** The thoughts of God are precious because they are gracious thoughts. God yearns for our restoration. More than that, he has promised our restoration and accomplished it in Jesus, who traded his righteousness for our unrighteousness. The LORD is full of mercy and forgiveness for Jesus' sake. In Christ Jesus, the Father's arms are open wide. All who repent of their sins and seek the LORD will live. Now instead of feeling heart-melting fear at the prospect of meeting God, we can look forward to that day with joyful anticipation.

“We should fear and love God, that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.” Sadly, Jeroboam and Amaziah and most of the citizens of Israel were not good examples of obedience to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. At times, we ourselves are more like them than it’s comfortable to admit. What will change that is realizing what a treasure of God’s mercy we have in the gospel of Jesus. Then we don’t have to be force-fed the Word of God—then it becomes a delight to learn about our Savior and grow in the knowledge of his love. Amen.