



*A Good Samaritan Church
Amos 7:7-17; Luke 10:25-37
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost ~ Sunday, July 14th, 2019
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

*Text: The lawyer said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise.
(Luke 10:6)*

"God said to me, 'What do you see, Amos?'

"I said, 'A plumb line.'

"The (God) said, 'Look what I've done. I've hung a plumb line in the midst of my people. I've spared them for the last time.'" (*The Message Bible by Eugene Peterson*).

The plumb line was used since the days of ancient Egypt, maybe even before then, to tell is something was "level", "true". It is used by some secret organizations to call its members to live lives worthy of example, true, "plumb".

Our Old Testament lesson is the third of three visions that the prophet Amos received from God.

Ancient Israel had lost sight of "why" God set is apart from all of the other nations.

It wasn't because they were the strongest--they weren't.

Nor was it because they were the largest--they weren't that either.

They were to be a "light" to the nations.

They were to "show the way"--the way of God.

Jesus once asked, "What good is salt if it has lost its saltiness? It is thrown out and trampled under foot." (*Matthew 5:13*)

Because they lost their sense of purpose, their "why", they would go into exile.

In our gospel lesson a lawyer approached Jesus and asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What does the Law say?" Jesus asked.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself", the lawyer replied.

"You have answered correctly."

Not satisfied, though, the lawyer then asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

The rabbis had already defined a neighbor.

The lawyer knew this.

He wasn't really interested in Jesus' answer.

There was something else going on here.

He wanted to be justified--what I call "The Little Jack Horner Syndrome": "My what a good boy am I!"

One commentator on this lesson said that asking a question with no intention of implementing the answer is either an exercise in futility or vanity.

Knowing the right answer to a question does not mean that you really know or understand.

As the late professor and preacher Fred Craddock noted, by asking who is "my neighbor" the lawyer implied a certain selectivity.

This selectivity allows us to exclude those who are not "like" us.

I would say that it is an example of theological "red-lining", keeping out those whom we do not like or who are different.

Jesus read between the lines, and thus, changed the focus of the question.

He told a story, the story of what we call "The Good Samaritan". Just heard it read a few minutes ago, so I will not repeat it.

But for too long the priest and the Levite have gotten a bad wrap.

They didn't do anything wrong.

They just didn't do anything.

Being a neighbor, in Jesus' sense of the word, in God's sense of the word, in the Kingdom's sense of the word implies a cost.

There is a cost to discipleship, to taking Jesus seriously.

It is easier to look away, to ignore, to hope that someone does something about a situation and comforting yourself with the thought that you are not that someone than to do something about it yourself.

It is easy to pray about this or that than to take prayerful action.

Notice that "being a neighbor" cost the Samaritan something.

He interrupted his journey.

He dressed and bandaged the wounded man's wounds.

He put him on his donkey and took him to an inn where he continued to care for him.

He paid the innkeeper to watch and care for the wounded traveler until the Samaritan could return.

Then, if there was anything owed, the Samaritan would settle up.

This was not a “one and done” deal.

Nor was it cheap.

It was a real investment.

He treated the wounded one in the same manner that he hoped someone, anyone would treat him because at one level he knew but that for the grace of God the beaten, bloodied, and naked man on the side of the road could have been him.

And this brings us back to the plumb line and the Old Testament prophet Amos.

Israel had been chosen by God out of all of the people of the world to be a “holy” people--to be an example of a God Kingdom life.

They were chosen not because of who they were but because of who God is.

God is love, and they were loved.

They were chosen because they were loved.

Isn't that true of us?

Isn't that what the baptismal font and communion table about?

Because we are loved aren't we called to be a “Good Samaritan” people?

A “Good Samaritan” church?

Darrell Gruder, a former Dean and Professor of Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary, once said that church does not exist primarily for the benefit of its own members but for the benefit of those outside its walls.

That does not mean that we do not care for one another.

We do care for one another when we attend the weddings, the funerals, the baptisms of one another, when we serve one another.

But our ministry must be larger than ourselves if we are to be true to our call, our purpose. We worship a big God who calls us into a big world.

James A. Forbes, Jr. said that the gospel calls us to take inventory of our assets for in God's grace we are not helpless victims of some alien powers but bearers of gifts, competencies, and influence for effecting change.

Just as Moses was told to use the rod in his hand and the disciples were told to feed the 5000 with the lunch they had, so we are expected to use what we have to promote the cause of God's Kingdom.

“The issue is not simply one of getting power but of becoming aware of how we use the power we have. The church is the sleeping giant.”

In the face of estrangement, dysfunction, and strife we are challenged to speak the truth in love.

We are challenged to learn how to forgive.

We are challenged to seek reconciliation.

We are challenged to confess, repent, and then we repeat. (paraphrase of Jill Duffield, Presbyterian Outlook)

In the face of generational poverty we are challenged not to throw up our hands in bewilderment and say that the problem is too large.

We are challenged to commit ourselves in finding an answer.

We are challenged to advocate for change so that children are not punished for the actions of the adults in their lives. We are challenged to work toward providing good nutrition and sound education and quality health care.

In the face of racism and xenophobia and prejudice and privilege we are challenged to educate ourselves and explore our own complicity.

We are challenged to cultivate relationships with those who are not like us, and in so doing, we set fear aside.

“Fear not” is arguably the most frequent commandment in Christian Scripture.

‘What do you see, Amos?’

“I said, ‘A plumb line.’

“The (God) said, ‘Look what I’ve done. I’ve hung a plumb line in the midst of my people.’” God’s plumb line in the midst of God’s people, those who willfully decide to take Jesus, the Son of God, the very incarnation of God, seriously take up the challenge that today’s lessons lays before us. We willfully live into our baptism.

A Samaritan church knows that God set a plumb line.

A Samaritan church accepts the challenge.

God be the glory. Amen.