

starters for Sunday

14th July 2013

Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Rev Robin McHaffie, Minister, Linton, Morebattle, Howman and Yetholm Parish Church gives his thoughts on this week's lectionary.

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[Amos 7:7-17](#)

I found a modern translation interesting and stimulating.

The Message (MSG)

7 God showed me this vision: My Master was standing beside a wall. In his hand he held a plumb line.

8-9 God said to me, “What do you see, Amos?”

I said, “A plumb line.”

Then my Master said, “Look what I’ve done. I’ve hung a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I’ve spared them for the last time. This is it!

“Isaac’s sex-and-religion shrines will be smashed,

Israel’s unholy shrines will be knocked to pieces.

I’m raising my sword against the royal family of Jeroboam.”

10 Amaziah, priest at the shrine at Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, king of Israel:

“Amos is plotting to get rid of you; and he’s doing it as an insider, working from within Israel. His talk will destroy the country. He’s got to be silenced. Do you know what Amos is saying?

11 ‘Jeroboam will be killed.

Israel is headed for exile.’

12-13 Then Amaziah confronted Amos: “Seer, be on your way! Get out of here and go back to Judah where you came from! Hang out there. Do your preaching there. But no more preaching at Bethel! Don’t show your face here again. This is the king’s chapel. This is a royal shrine.”

14-15 But Amos stood up to Amaziah: “I never set up to be a preacher, never had plans to be a preacher. I raised cattle and I pruned trees. Then God took me off the farm and said, ‘Go preach to my people Israel.’

16-17 “So listen to God’s Word. You tell me, ‘Don’t preach to Israel. Don’t say anything against the family of Isaac.’ But here’s what God is telling you:

Your wife will become a whore in town.



Your children will get killed.

Your land will be auctioned off.

You will die homeless and friendless.

And Israel will be hauled off to exile, far from home.”

Jeroboam is the King of Israel, the non-Judean tribes following the division after Solomon's death. Bethel is the chief sanctuary of the Israelites and here Jeroboam has set up a Golden Calf (1 Kings 12.28) for worship. The Message has – “But no more preaching at Bethel! Don't show your face here again. This is the king's chapel. This is a royal shrine.” Amos recounts his vocation and selection process to Jeroboam's priest. He is the first called of the 8th Century canonical prophets and is important, not least, because of his concept of the Day of the Lord. This would herald a golden age and a time of justice. This is contrasted here with a court that had become wealthy over a period of peace and stability but that had neglected the poor and had set up idolatrous and immoral practices. These Amos feels engaged to contend against. On the Day of the Lord Israel's reward will be humiliation and downfall.

This is the third vision of Amos and uses the simple tool of a plumb line. The simplicity of this tool to judge the straightness of a wall/level disguises a line of symbolic/metaphoric usage of the plumb from antiquity to modern freemasonry. This in itself would be worth exploring. This vision leads to the oracle against the state and religion. McKeating in his *Cambridge Bible Commentary* draws out from the dialogue with Amaziah an interesting contrast between professional prophets and Amos. The comment you will be better paid in Judah presumes this and the reply of Amos articulates his calling as a directly given vocation from God. He stands up to the Religious leader and continues to unsettle Israel with his criticisms. McKeating also points out that ‘the Word of the Lord’ was considered to have a force or a power in itself and therefore would be viewed as a danger to the state. Hence the accusation of sedition.



Moyter in his book *the Day of the Lion, the Message of Amos*, offers a theme of testing of the prophet that might make a useful thread for a sermon. He says there is no service of God ‘without opposition persecution and trial’ and he lists 3 ways in which this is happening here and 3 rejoinders. Firstly, by misrepresentation (8.10.11). Have we not all suffered this? Those who oppose our stance or our teaching twisting what we are saying. Here Amos is charged with conspiracy when he is but offering counsel, his words are used to change the context as noted particularly in saying he said the King would die in battle. His warning that Israel would go into exile is seen as treason rather than concern. The second testing is the temptation offered of finding an easier way of expressing his vocation in the sunny south where the wages for a prophet are better and the folk might be more receptive. It was this that produced the narrative of his calling and McKeating offers that some commentators think that this rejoinder is inserted here and that it may have existed as a pamphlet in circulation authenticating Amos’ credentials. The third test came with the confrontation with authority. It is a hard ask to stand at the door of the chapel royal, confront the Chief Religious Leader and tell him, and therefore all, that their religion is false and corrupt. He does and even when confronted says – ‘Here is what God is saying...’ This is both a reminder that the prophets of this period believed they were given what to say directly from God and an insight into how that must have impacted on Jesus who would be looked upon in this light for much of his prophetic teaching. Moyter offers the parallel with Acts and the charge to the apostles not to teach in his name being countered with ‘ We must obey God rather than men.’ (Acts 5.29)

[Psalm 82](#)

There is a lot of material in these few verses, but to keep focussed on the Amos’ thoughts we could pick up on the ‘Council of Gods’ produced here. Rather than the itinerant prophet rattling the cages of the Red Frocked Magisterium of ecclesiastical power, we now enter a fantasy of cosmic courts and judgements. The council of gods, whatever that may be, are called to a court over which God, as High Judge rules. One imagines that they are accused of dereliction of their Godly duty. While faffing about amongst the Elysian Fields, they have left the towns and villages of the world down there descend into some kind of free for all where the poor and marginalised are left without anyone to speak for them.



Such is the seriousness of this criminality that the very foundations of the earth are shaken. (Title of a Paul Tillich book) The judgement – they are sentenced to mortality. Now there is a thought!

Or

[Deuteronomy 30:9-14](#)

We are nearing the end of the Pentateuch and about to see the death of Moses. Before this the Covenant at Sinai is renewed (ch29) and now the promise is made by Moses that forgiveness will always follow true repentance. Here we learn that this is no complicated theological or dogmatic principle, nor something that requires of us complex ritual practice – a simple choice is before us – obey the word and live. (Cf Romans 10 5-10)

or

[Psalm 25](#)

Psalm 25 is a more poetic way of saying what is in the Deuteronomy text. It lends itself to a responsive reading.

A Responsive Reading of Psalm 25: 1-9

To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

O my God, in You I trust;

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies rejoice over me.

Do not let those who wait for You be put to shame;

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know Your ways, O Lord;

teach me Your paths.



Let me in Your truth, and teach me,
for You are the God of my salvation;
for You I wait all day long.

**Be mindful of Your mercy, O Lord,
and of Your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**

Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to Your steadfast love remember me,
for Your goodness' sake, O Lord!

**Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore He instructs sinners in the way.
He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble His way.**

Christine Longhurst at [Worship Blogspot](#)



[Colossians 1:1-14](#)

The letter to Colossae picks up this theme of right and wrong teaching or practice. We are only treated to the greeting on this Sunday, but if we are going to use the Epistle over the next few weeks it might be worth introducing the good people of this town to the congregation (s) and the fear of division brought by a rival spirituality from the Gnostic or Judaisitic school with an emphasis on high days and holidays, ascetic mysticism and the sort of ecstatic experiences that lead us into the angelic places. (*Bowker J*) I was in France in May and happened upon a 2 day holiday when France shut. On enquiring what it was for I was met with blank stares – it was the Ascension I realised later.

On the way back the ferry was mobbed – it was a Friday night and hordes of people were obviously enjoying a long weekend and another holiday – what for I asked the odd traveller? Shrug – it was of course Pentecost. Should one be glad the festivals of the church are still marked by holidays.

The cosmic Christ they worship is placed within the context of a growing world church and a special thanksgiving is offered for their part in this new world movement.

[Luke 10:25-37](#)

We are being directed today to two different types of religion – the one of grace, the other of the law, or of love, versus ritual. For this reason a focus on this story as the difference between the one rather than the other might be the way forward. Are we to imagine the setting as a public debate? It feels an arranged event – ‘a lawyer stood up...’ This conversation now illustrates the difference between the ethics of the kingdom and that of the cult. Following Caird, eternal life would be a prize to be won following the meticulous observance of the law. Jesus is being tested as an expositor rather than dealing with a seeker of faith. The lawyer is asked, and sums up the law in the maxim of loving God and neighbour. As we know, there were 613 laws to observe for the Jew to exhibit love to God and a broad spectrum of exclusions as to who was not the neighbour that could limit or perhaps annul the sense of loving one’s neighbour. For Jesus loving God and neighbour is to already live in the kingdom. Jesus lets the question, who is my neighbour? reflect back upon the lawyer.



To quote Caird, "It is essential to the story that the traveller was left half dead." The thought that the passers-by might be defiled by the dead was of more import to them than a look see if he was still alive. "Jesus deliberately shocks the lawyer by forcing him to consider that a semi-pagan foreigner might know more about the love of God than a devout Jew blinded by pettifogging rules." (Caird)

The Golden Rule

It happened again that a certain stranger came before Shammai and said to him:

--"I will become a proselyte providing you teach me the whole Torah while I'm standing on one foot."

(Shammai) knocked him down with the builder's rule in his hand.

(The stranger) came before, Hillel, who made him a proselyte.

He told him:

--"What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor.

That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go, learn (it)!"

-- Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18).

Rabbi Aqiba (ben Joseph) said:

--"This is the great principle of the Torah."

-- Midrash, *Siphra* 19.18 (89a)

Who to love or hate

"...and hatred on one's fellows (excludes a person from the world to come)":

Thus one learns a man is not to say:

--"Love the sages but hate the disciples," (or)

love the disciples but hate worldly people" [*am ha aretz*].

Rather, love them all.



But hate Epicureans, instigators, apostates and informers.

Even David said so:

--"LORD, I hate those who hate you..." (Ps 139:21).

But does it not say:

--"You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD" (Lev 19:18)?

On what ground?

--"Because I created him! And if he does what your people do, you shall love him; but if he does not, you shall not love him."

-- Babylonian Talmud (supplement), *Abot^h de R. Nathan* 16.4

Martin Luther from a sermon on the text found at [Luther Gospel](#)

This lawyer was perhaps a wise man and well acquainted with the Scriptures, as his answer also suggests; yet here he becomes a fool, and must first begin to learn from the Lord, when he is put to shame and disgrace. For Christ teaches him a good lesson, and with one word takes out of him all his self-conceit. For he was in the delusion that he had kept the law wholly and perfectly, and was therefore something extra, above others, which undoubtedly he was, and imagined, because he was so pious and learned, that he was of course worthy to talk with the Lord. But now what does the Lord do to ensnare him in a masterly manner? He does this: he permits him to judge himself.

I found this stimulating;-

In the days of the Struggle to end Apartheid here in South Africa, there was a saying that was borrowed from the American Civil Rights movement a decade earlier. It said, "If the law becomes a thief, it is just to break the law." Examples of this civil disobedience were clergy who married Black, Coloured, Indian and Chinese people to Caucasian people despite the fact that it was not permitted in terms of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, Act No 55 of 1949.



The marriage could not be registered legally, but the ministers performing the marriage knew that in the sight of God these two people were married even if the state would not acknowledge this.

As I look once more at this socially outrageous story of the Good Samaritan, set in the context of Jesus' debate with a sophisticated lawyer's sophistry, one thing becomes clear. Law and Compassion do not sit easily together. In fact, nine times out of ten, law seems to quench love. On the other hand, compassionate love, if it is to be true to Jesus, will at some point probably have to break some laws. Loving like Jesus (who is the archetypal Good Samaritan and Good Shepherd) is not for faint hearts.

Reflecting on over thirty years of ministry I recognise that everytime I have kept the rules of the church with regard to who may or may not be baptised, confirmed, married, or buried in the Church, inevitably, someone has got hurt or excluded. Usually both. During such times I have always felt such a coward having hidden in the thicket of the law.

This parable brings home to me a recognition, that whilst I may find the most erudite reasons to justify non-engagement with the suffering of those lying in my path, in most cases, I will be motivated by Law and not by Love. I have become a robber too.

You see, the poor man lying on the side of the road was robbed twice. The first robbers took his goods and beat him up. At the hands of the priest and Levite, he was robbed a second time. The priest and Levite robbed him of compassionate justice.

It is true. The law is a thief, whenever it steals my love away.

Thanks be to God we are called not to be lawyers, but lovers for Jesus. (Woods P, Listening Hermit)

References

Bowker, John, 1998 (New one for me!) *The Complete Bible Handbook*, Dorling Kindersley, London

Caird, GB *Saint Luke*, 1963, Pelican, London

McKeating H, *Amos, Hosea, Micah*, 1971, University Press, Cambridge

Moyter LA, *The Day of the Lion*, 1974, Inter-Varsity Press, London



Neil W, *One Volume Bible Commentary*, 1962, Hodder and Stoughton, London

Woods, Peter, click here: [the listening hermit](#)



Prayers

Collect of the Day

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless
till they find their rest in you.
Give us peace in your service,
and in the world to come
the joy of seeing you face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Sentence

Out of the treasure of his glory God
grant you inward strength and power
through his Spirit, that through faith
Christ may dwell in your hearts in love.

Ephesians 3: 16, 17



Call to worship

Once upon a time

a wise man offered a challenge;

"What is the greatest commandment?"

The calendars on our desks share a vision of greatness;

bills to pay, phone calls to return, appointments to keep.

Love the Lord your God.

The cameras of our memories share what commands us;

children to bathe and partners to help

parents calling and grandchildren hopeful.

Love the Lord your God

with all your heart, and with all your soul,

and with all your mind.

Still the Spirit lures us to new priorities;

open spaces to experience wonder,

strangers becoming friends,

devotion to that which transcends.

Love the Lord your God

with all your heart, and with all your soul,

and with all your mind.

Love your neighbor as yourself.



~ written by Katherine Hawker (2002) and posted on **Liturgies Outside**.

A Prayer of Approach and Confession

Blessed be God the Father

Creator of all that there is all that has been

And all that will be

So mighty in being and so powerful in deed

Yet exalted above and beyond all thought

coming to care for the lowly and listen to the voices

of the poor of the earth,

and the anxious of his flock.

We adore you our God, Father Son and Spirit and we have come to worship and pray in the love of the trinity binding all three and one with all your people.

Awaken us to your presence Lord God that we sense a love encompassing us, a truth enfolding us and a path before us making us new, granting us a vision of a true life offering us the word that makes us whole.

We enter your courts this day as children seeking pardon and renewal.

When we hear of the courage of a prophet help us to own the inadequacy of our witness to the truth that has set us free.

When we hear the praise of Psalmist and apostle let us own the mediocrity that sometimes colours our offerings to the Prince of Peace and his church.

When we hear of a reminder of cost of discipleship and the expectations of love in your name help us to own how selective we can be in the offering of self , love and charity to others around us or in your world.



Pardon us O Lord and grant us forgiveness through he who died on the cross to save us - even Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus said I have not come to invite virtuous people, but to call sinners to repentance. So let us in all humility accept the grace on offer and free us from anxieties for the morrow, the temptations of false teaching and deliver us from self-seeking that we may live content and be generous with that which we have been blessed through him who loved us from the first and will love us to the last.

Amen

Thanksgiving

From heaven you send wisdom to walk our streets and enter our market places – observing, appraising and gathering the minutia of our lives. She comments, she proclaims she counsels and those of us who hear her within know the truths about ourselves and our business through the eyes of our Maker.

We thank you for Wisdom enriching and ennobling our path.

From heaven you send your son to bring light to our hearts and hearths. A companion, a Master and friend in whom we need never be alone and with whom we may never doubt our own value in the eye of God.

We thank you for Christ Redeeming our life.

From Heaven you send your Spirit to infuse our world with the gifts of faith and grace. Mothering us into this new life of wholeness and abundance – feeding us with affirmation of belonging to Father Son and Spirit three in the circle of Love that is Trinity

We thank you for the Holy Spirit keeping us in communion with each other and our God.

In glad thanksgiving we praise you for this world of wonder, beauty and providence.

And humbly we thank you for Christ, for all he has done for us through his passion and death, his teaching and challenge, his rising and presence in you – in us.



For the church we praise you and give thanks that in all her breadth she is local – and in all her complexities she is so straightforward in the offer of bread and wine for our brokenness and eternal nourishment.

For these and all your mercies we humbly offer these words of thanksgiving, O God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Intercessions

Ever present Father before whom the needs and desires of your every child are known before we ask hear these our prayers for this your world, your people and ourselves. Forgive any foolishness in these our petitions and lead us to pray with you for the needs and pains of this world rather than at you.

Let us first pray for your church here on earth in all its breadth – for growing churches and for shrinking places, for the dynamic and the tired, for the traditional and the emerging – bring about a sense of oneness, not just in confessional statements but in the hearts of all believers that we might understand that formal and informal, traditional or off the wall we are one in the love of Christ and so family.

Let us pray for the folk of all nations struggling with economic realities and facing changing patterns of financial governance. We pray with you for real and effective care for the weak and vulnerable in our midst – make us prophets and examples of fairness equality and generosity, in Jesus' name, that we may speak and influence those who make decisions crucial to the daily realities of life for millions of your people.

We pray that we never walk by on the other side when our neighbour is lying in need before us – so direct our feet, our hearts and our wallets to the need around us and abroad for the sake of him him who gave up everything for us.

We pray for the growth of a courageous, relevant and focussed prophetic voice to rise within us. May there be those who can be heard to lay the claims of truth and Justice, love and peace before a world struggling to own values, truths or beliefs in this our day.



On a day in which we have remembered bad leadership in church and state we pray for those in authority in church and nation. We remember especially her Majesty the Queen and her family seeking your continued blessing upon her and praising you for her leadership and grace amongst us.

Let us remember before you those known to us or of our number, family or place who are in pain, are experiencing poor health in body or mind. We pray in the name of Father Son and Spirit for their healing and wholeness – may your peace rest upon them this day and may they know that they have a saviour watching over them, even now. We remember to those who sit and watch with them, those who are alongside the dying and all carers needing affirmed and cosseted themselves as they bear the burdens of others.

We praise and thank you, o God, for the great company of believers who have gone before us to your eternal kingdom. We thank you especially for those we remember today who spoke in your name or cared for others from your love. May these be our examples in this life and may we honour them by our tongues and hearts in hymns of never ending praise through Jesus Christ our Lord to whom with you and the Holy Spirit be all honour and glory, world without end.

Amen



Children's Address

Sermon4kids.com has Dr Seuss and Horton meets a who, click here: [Sermon for kids !](#)

Retell the story of the Good Samaritan with more available images. Use the image of the woman who confronted the man who had killed the soldier in May while others walked by. The courage that needed and what kind of people are we who walk by when there is need. A gift of a Sunday to say with the kids what you want the adults to hear but are too timid to do it later?



Hymns

CH4 Psalm 1	How blest are they that do not stray
CH4 Psalm 9	God shall endure for aye
CH4 708	O lord the cloud are gathering
CH4 264	Judge eternal
CH4 Psalm 78	The Praises of the Lord our God
CH4 545	Lord teach us how to pray aright
CH4 622	We sing a love that sets all people free
CH4 644	O Jesus I have promised
CH4 319	Of the Father's Love begotten
CH4 544	When I needed a neighbour
CH4 688	Brother sister
CH4 237	Look forward in faith
CH4 252	As a fire is meant for burning
CH4 621	Spirit of Jesus, if I love my neighbour



Additional Resources

Resourcing Mission



www.resourcingmission.org.uk is host to Starters for Sunday as well as key mission resources from the Church of Scotland, for download and purchase, and has an online booking facility for Mission & Discipleship events (eg National Youth Assembly). Please check back regularly, as new items are being added all the time. We welcome all feedback so if there is something you'd like to see on this new site that isn't already there, please use the 'Website Feedback' option on the 'Contact Us' page.

Prayer Resources

These materials are designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in Prayers. You may also be interested in looking at our publication **Pray Now 2013**. Please click [here](#).



Music Resources

The hymns mentioned in this material are ideas of specific hymns you might choose for this week's themes. However, for some excellent articles on church music and ideas for new music resources, please check out our online music magazine **Different Voices** which can be found [here](#).

Preaching Resources



These materials are designed to be a starting point for **what** you might preach this Sunday. If you would be interested in looking at our free materials on **how** you might preach, please click [here](#) to see our **Preachers**

Perspectives web page where we have asked twelve preachers to share the insights they have gathered through their experiences of writing and delivering sermons regularly.



Scots Worship Resources

[The Kirk's Ear](#) - Scots i the Kirk series for Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost and other times of the year

[Wurship Ouk bi Ouk](#) - Metrical psalms, hymns, prayers and words for worship

[Scots Sacraments](#) - If you are celebrating Communion or have a Baptism you may find some helpful materials here

Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Rev Robin McHaffie, Minister, Linton, Morebattle, Howman and Yetholm Parish Church for giving his thoughts on this week's lectionary.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

