**July 15, 2018**

**Proper 10, 8 Sunday after Pentecost**

**Amos 7:7-15**

This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by;

the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.' "

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycomore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'”

**The Response**

**Psalm 85:8-13**

***Benedixisti, Domine***

8 I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, \*
for he is speaking peace to his faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to him.

9 Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, \*
that his glory may dwell in our land.

10 Mercy and truth have met together; \*
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, \*
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, \*
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him, \*
and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

**The Epistle**

**Ephesians 1:3-14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

**The Gospel**

**Mark 6:14-29**

King Herod heard of Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus’ name had become known. Some were saying, “John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.” But others said, “It is Elijah.” And others said, “It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.” And he solemnly swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” She went out and said to her mother, “What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Imagine you are at dinner at the Presidential Palace. You are eating dinner with Herod, the President.

The meal is amazing

The tables and decorations are immaculate

You are done up right

There is music and entertainment.

You are surrounded by friends, acquaintances, business contacts, and some enemies – and you have to be careful.

Herod has already shown himself to be cruel and unforgiving. He has called foreigners dogs, he has killed, imprisoned, enslaved, and tortured friends and enemies alike. Anything to hold onto power.

He’s even arrested John the Baptist who was a harmless wild man. But the rumor is that his new wife, didn’t like him very much so she convinced Herod to arrest him. Who knows though, palace intrigue and rumors abound. So you have to be very careful bc Herod values loyalty over all and doesn’t deal well with being talked about and you never know what your punishment could be, so you keep your mouth shut, you smile, you eat, you laugh, you drink, you clap very loudly when Herod’s daughter comes out and dances. Again, all the chaos and squabbling, you never know who’s watching.

But earlier that day when you were leaving the barber shop or the beauty salon, you had seen this Jesus everyone was talking about in the town square. He was preaching, teaching, and healing in the name of God. He had been saying all these things that just felt so true to you, and that felt so different from the world you actually lived in.

And you couldn’t help but think – what if the world lived by the things this Jesus guy said? What if the only true thing in the world was love? What if we did love God, trust God, work to know God and in so doing love our neighbor as ourselves? What if we actually lived our lives if that were true?

Would you be sitting here at this dinner surrounded by these people, continually accepting worse and worse situations – I mean I know Herod had said those horrible things about those other people and I know he had tortured those people, but you always wonder if it could or if he could get any worse and you comfort yourself that he might not, but he always does. Herod can always stoop lower, he can always be worse.

And forgetting Herod and his actions, what does it actually mean for you to live as if the only true thing in the world is love? It matters, obviously, what other people do, but the only thing you can control is what you do, your own actions.

And then you remember your Amos – that the Lord God showed Amos that

the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And Amos said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said, “See, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel; I will never again pass them by;

And you can see in your heart and mind that the plumb line the Lord set, the straight line the Lord set cuts a direct path from Amos’ prophesying to Jesus calling us to love God and to love our neighbor. You can see that line and that straight line is for you to know that God is with you and God is with God’s people.

8 Because you will listen to what the Lord God is saying, \*
for God is speaking peace to God’s faithful people
and to those who turn their hearts to God.

10 Mercy and truth have met together; \*
righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

11 Truth shall spring up from the earth, \*
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, \*
and our land will yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before God, \*
and peace shall be a pathway for God’s feet.

You look around you and know you don’t belong with these people and this is not your party. You look at Herod and think, he is just an evil ruler in an evil time and you will do what you can in your own way to spread love and the salvation of Jesus Christ.

You will do your work and will find ways to resist the horror that is Herod. But you will not focus on that, your eye will instead be trained on the plumb line. The straight line God has put in your heart that points directly to the love, grace, and salvation of Jesus. You will spread this love to the ends of the earth. Maybe it’s time to get up from this dinner party and go home.